



8 PROPOSED PARK ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Three different park development concepts were prepared and presented to the citizens of North Carolina through a public open house and internet-based online comment form. The Chimney Rock State Park public comment form was designed to solicit input on a series of questions relevant to park visitation, programming, and planning. Although not a statistically-valid survey, the comment form was an important tool in the planning process, enabling the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation to understand important concerns and desires of future park users. It was distributed in hardcopy format to participants at the public open house meeting in May 2010 and was made more broadly available online from late May through June of 2010. A total of 586 responses were recorded. The results of each question are featured in detail in Appendix A. The key results of the online comment form include:

- A strong desire for increased hiking, camping, mountain biking, and rock climbing opportunities in Chimney Rock State Park
- A preference for a park master plan that incorporates recreation and development that has a low-impact on the environment, with a focus on conservation
- Request for public access to closed trails
- A need for conservation and protection of significant natural resources
- An interest in more day use areas and increased public access areas

MAY 2010 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE WORKSHOP

On May 26, 2010, the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation conducted a public planning session at Lake Lure Town Hall. Citizens were invited to view and comment on three proposed design alternatives for Chimney Rock State Park, ask questions to N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation staff and the project consultant, and share ideas regarding the future of the state park.



Park staff, project consultants, and the general public discussed each of the alternatives at a planning workshop, and hundreds of people provided input online (see Appendix A for all public comments).





The May workshop was a drop-in style meeting that took place from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. Display boards were set up illustrating regional context, park programming, and inventory/analysis maps of the project study area. A regional trails map and typical park facilities board was also made available. Three map stations contained the proposed design alternatives, where participants were given the opportunity to submit written comments (each alternative is shown and described on the following pages). Workshop participants were asked to complete a comment form that contained specific questions relevant to the project. Questions such as park visitation frequency, recreational interests, and future park facilities were included on the comment form. A total of 157 participants signed the attendance registration sheet. All comments from this workshop are included in Appendix A.

Immediately following the workshop for a period of four weeks, a project resources webpage and the on-line comment form were made available to provide an opportunity for continued public input. The project resources webpage included links to all workshop materials and informational boards for downloading and viewing, as well as a link to the online comment form.

PARK DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES PRESENTED AT THE WORKSHOP

The three alternatives presented at the May 2010 open house workshop are described on the following pages. Under all three alternatives, improvements would be made to existing facilities, infrastructure and trails at the former Chimney Rock Park tourist destination. These repairs and renovations to modernize the facilities should improve safety and the visitor experience. Existing substandard and unsustainable trails in backcountry areas of all park properties would be abandoned and revegetated where feasible. The three alternatives include:

- Alternative #1: Conservation-Focused Park
- Alternative #2: Low Impact Recreation
- Alternative #3: Intensive Recreation and Use

ALTERNATIVE #1: CONSERVATION-FOCUSED PARK

Protection and stewardship of Significant Natural Heritage Areas is the guiding philosophy for the Conservation-Focused Park alternative (Figure 8.1). Significant Natural Heritage Areas comprise eight different areas of the Chimney Rock State Park study area and are shown in this concept as conservation management areas. Each conservation management area would incorporate methods for natural species protection, including ecosystem and landscape-scale stewardship with minimal human disturbance. Under this scenario, public access within the conservation management areas would be limited to prioritize natural resource conservation over general outdoor recreation.

The Conservation-Focused Park alternative would use the existing park entrance and entry road. Under this scenario, development of new and additional park facilities would be minimized in accordance with the conservation-based design concept. A visitor center is proposed across from the Lake Lure Town Hall, and would be connected to the community via the Lake Lure Greenway. Two day use areas are proposed, one at Bottomless Pools and the other near Shumont Mountain. Several proposed hiking trails occur in the northern, central, and southern part of Chimney Rock State Park. The first would extend from Exclamation Point to the top of Chimney Rock Mountain and loop around the Orchards. The other trail would begin at the Shumont Mountain day use area and extend along the Rumbling Bald ridge, with an out-and-back option or a loop around the north side of Rumbling Bald. Approximately 10 miles of proposed hiking trails are included within this concept.



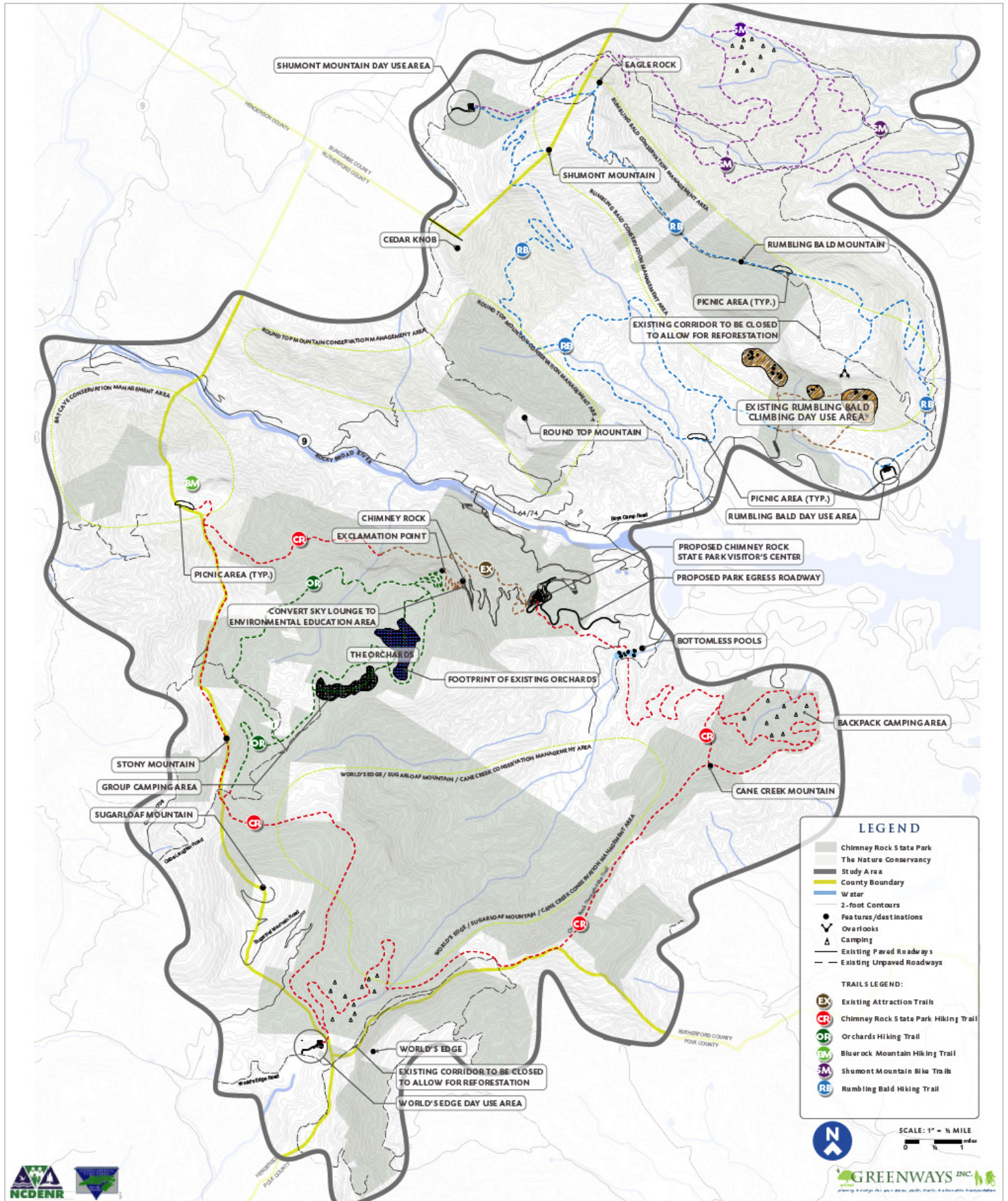
ALTERNATIVE # 2: LOW IMPACT RECREATION

The Low Impact Recreation alternative (Figure 8.2) proposes the use of existing disturbed areas for future park development activity. Taking advantage of areas that are cleared, flat, or previously developed minimizes environmental impact and creates opportunity for lower cost and more environmentally sensitive park expansion and development. The Low Impact Recreation alternative would transform the existing entrance road into a one-way ingress road that leads to a proposed visitor center at the Meadows. From the Meadows, a new two-way road is proposed that would extend to Proctor Road in Lake Lure. The visitor center at the Meadows would incorporate parking for approximately 300 cars and use permeable paving solutions. Park administrative offices are proposed at the Meadows and the entrance gate would be relocated further into the park so that the Chimney Rock State Park visitor center could be accessed without going through the fee station.

The proposed visitor center at the Meadows would become a recreational hiking hub for Chimney Rock State Park, and an extensive network of trails would be accessible from this area that lead to Chimney Rock, the Orchards, World's Edge, Cane Creek Mountain, and other destinations in the central and southern part of the park. The trail network would also include an extended hiking option with camping and day use areas strategically located so that hikers of all skill levels could hike at their own pace.

Day use areas are proposed at World's Edge, near Shumont Mountain, and near Rumbling Bald. The proposed Rumbling Bald day use area would be an expansion of the existing day use area that would accommodate more visitors and provide an increase in the variety of recreational uses. The area of Chimney Rock State Park that encompasses Rumbling Bald, Shumont Mountain, Eagle Rock, and Round Top Mountain would become a more remote visitor experience, with limited park facilities and access to more strenuous hiking, mountain biking, and rock climbing.

FIGURE 8.2: ALTERNATIVE # 2: LOW IMPACT RECREATION





ALTERNATIVE # 3: INTENSIVE RECREATION AND USE

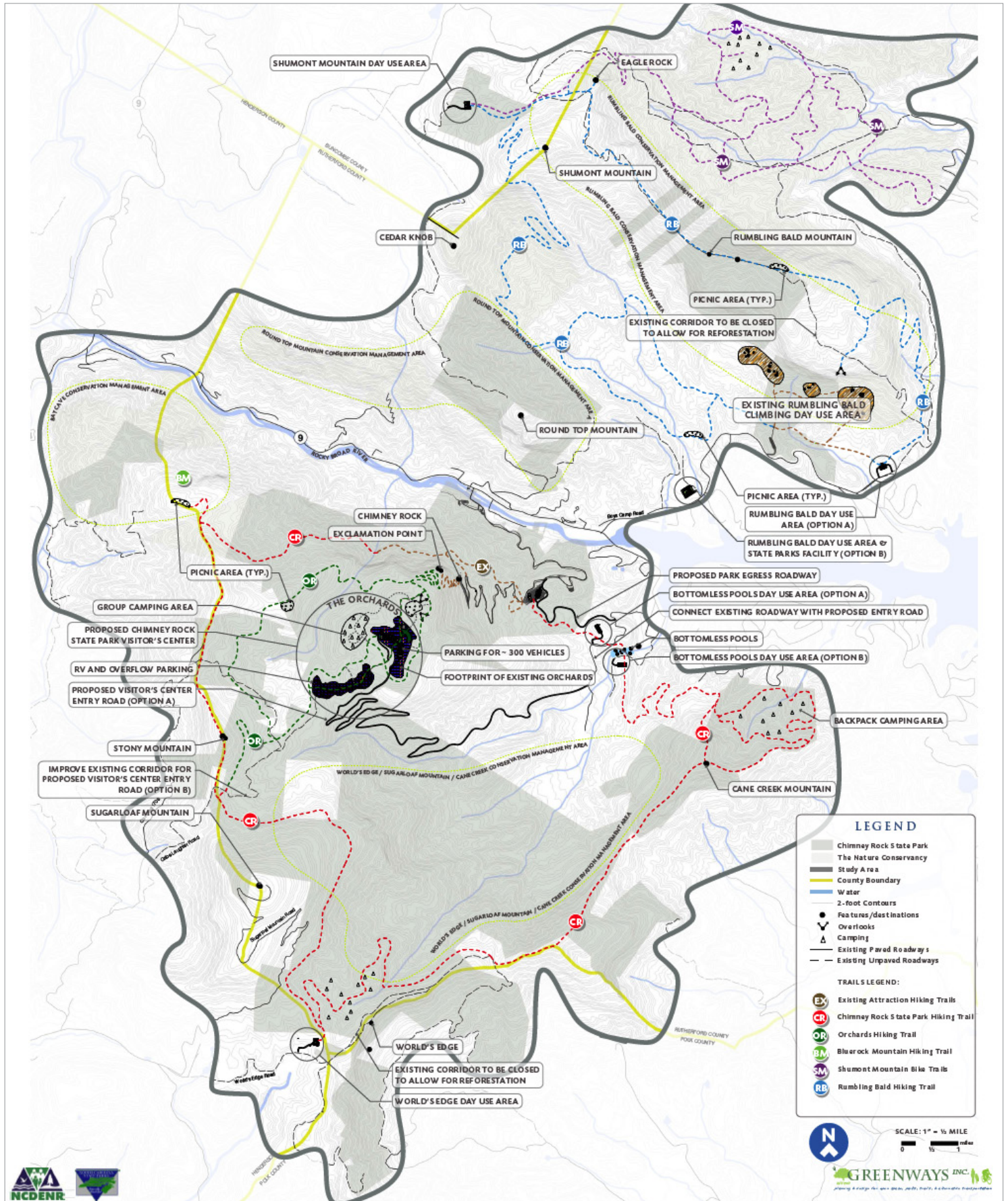
The Intensive Recreation and Use alternative (Figure 8.3) proposes park facilities at multiple access points throughout the study area, and would provide the user with various day use locations, overnight camping, and recreation opportunities for all people regardless of their ability. A visitor center is proposed for development at the top of Chimney Rock Mountain, in an area known as the Orchards, an abandoned 25-acre apple orchard. The new visitor center would be a large hub for nature-based recreation within the central and southern parts of Chimney Rock State Park with access to tent-and-trailer camping, picnicking, and hiking.

Vehicular access to the Orchards is challenging with respect to the mountainous terrain. Two options for an entry road to the Orchards have been identified for this alternative. The first option is a new roadway that ties to Proctor Road in Lake Lure. This new roadway would extend along the west side of Chimney Rock Mountain. Due to steep topography, the road would be extremely costly and likely cause an adverse environmental impact. A second roadway option would extend from Sugarloaf Mountain Road to the Orchards. This option would use an existing road corridor, reducing both the road cost and environmental impact of first road option described above. However, a proposed park entrance via Sugarloaf Mountain Road would require a longer drive to the Orchards than the proposed road extension from Proctor Road in Lake Lure.

In addition to the visitor center at the Orchards, a day use area is proposed at World's Edge and at Bottomless Pools. The Bottomless Pools day use areas has two options. The first option would be to renovate the existing facility. The second option would be to provide access via trails to Bottomless Pools, and locate visitor facilities elsewhere nearby in order to mitigate congestion during peak use.

A second park facility and small-scale visitor center is proposed near Rumbling Bald. This facility could serve as a potential satellite park administration office and day use area for the northern part of Chimney Rock State Park. Smaller day use areas with public toilets and parking would be located near the Rumbling Bald Climbing Day Use Area and near Shumont Mountain. These day use areas would become gateways for mountain biking, equestrian, rock climbing, and hiking. Other activities proposed in the northern part of the park include picnicking, camping and guided hiking tours.

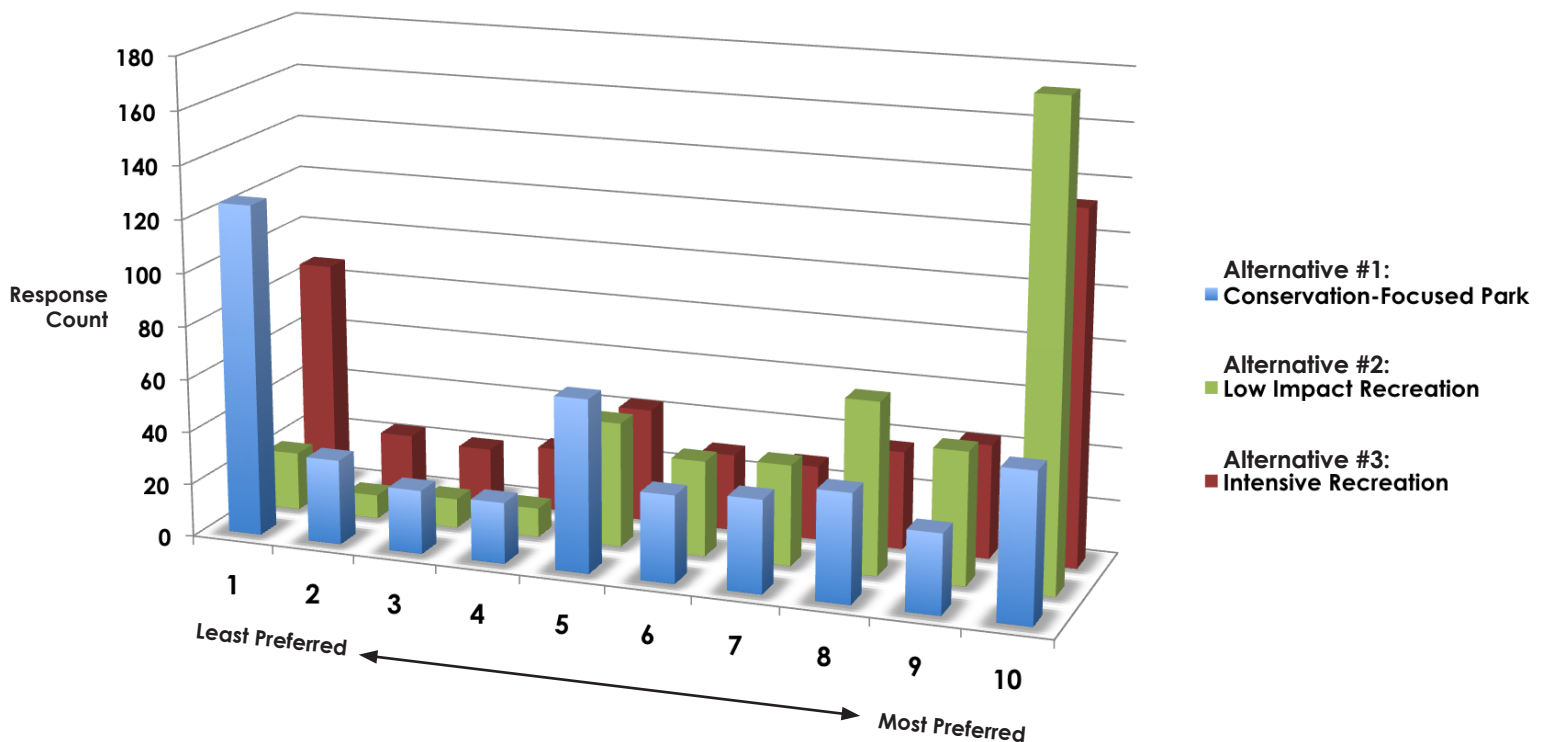
FIGURE 8.3: ALTERNATIVE # 3: INTENSIVE RECREATION AND USE



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC RESPONSES TO THE THREE ALTERNATIVES

Figure 8.4 displays public input regarding the three alternatives. In the public comment form, respondents were asked to rate the alternatives from one to ten, ten being their most preferred alternative. As shown in the bar graph below, *Alternative #2: Low Impact Recreation* was the most preferred; it had the highest response counts in the six through ten range and the least in the one through five range. Conversely, *Alternative #1: Conservation-Focused Park*, was the least preferred, with high response counts in the one through five range, and the least in the six through ten range.

FIGURE 8.4: PUBLIC PREFERENCE FOR THE THREE ALTERNATIVES



Respondents were also asked what they liked most about the alternatives, and what they would change. Their open-ended responses reflected a wide range of opinions, but in summary, they most often indicated a desire for more opportunities for mountain biking, climbing, hiking, and camping (in that order). Please see Appendix A for more comment form results, including text from all open-ended responses from the public.

Using the feedback obtained from the public, along with input and direction from the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, a preferred alternative for Chimney Rock State Park was prepared and is described in Chapters 10 of this master plan.